

Selina was awfully pleased with the herring-bone compliment. Sabina Ann, on the contrary, said she was disgusted ; and to be apologised for by an old boatman was significant of women's true position !

"Directly people begin to apologise," she said, "you know where you are."

I let Selina and Sabina argue the matter out. There are moments when, if speech is eloquent, silence is golden. I wanted to keep in with them both, and if anybody has ever attempted that sort of thing walking between two ladies differing, they will understand the extreme awkwardness of the position. If I sided with Selina, Sabina would cut me, and if I sided with Sabina, Selina would eat me. I pretended to be deeply occupied with the search for apartments, and to be the practical element among visionaries.

"Speak up, Phoebe," said Sabina Ann suddenly, "you sha'n't be a neutral."

"There are the apartments I dreamt about last night," I said warily. "The landlady in my dream wore spectacles, and had seen what she called the 'ups and downs.'"

"Avoid those sort of people, whether in dreams or out of them," said Sabina. "The lute of 'Ups and Downs' is legion. We shall have to hear all about the family mansion that was, and the pedigreed skeletons, and the naughty, naughty husband who drove 'em all mad !"

Our steps had led us away from Sunbury proper to a little off-street approached by a lane, a sort of "lovely" looking spot, where yokels doubtless court after their own peculiar fashion—a fashion which is decidedly more eloquent of silent rapture than aught else. Speak they never do ; they "keep company," whatever that is. Not much company about it, apparently. Whatever

lessons sweet Mother Earth has taught our yokels, she has not taught them to rise above the lowing of the ox, or the braying of the ass, or the grunting of the pig; for certain am I, did the animal world take to talk, they would talk each after its own kind; and if the peacock "tweecied" like a duke, the pig would grunt like our Sam Paine, who lives "up street," as our village is called.

"Sam will you come to church on Sunday, and say your prayers, and hear our vicar preach?"

"Yew, you, yer!"

"Remember, Sam, time is passing, and Sundays come and go, and come more quickly than they go."

"Yer, you, yer!" (New departure.)

"What a capital dog that is of yours after the sheep!" (Patting the dog.)

"Yer, you, yer!"

"Well, Sam, we shall see you in church. We shall look out for you." (Yes, verily.)

"Yer, you, yer!" (And he's got a vote, and I haven't.)

Ah, me! will there be a special paradise for folks with a conscience without education, and for folks with education and no conscience?

"That's a haunted house," said Sabina Ann, who is supposed to be more susceptible to medium and hypnotic suggestions than either Selina or me.

We had stopped before a long, low-looking house at the end of the "lovely" lane. A huge board with "Apartments" was stuck conspicuously among the laurels, which edged it round with a gleaming aureole peculiar to laurels.

"Rubbish!" said Selina.

The amount of ease with which unimaginative folks toss off that word "Rubbish!" has often struck me. "Rubbish!" It's a queer old cart-load, "full up" with

everything imaginary, from an imaginary polypus in the nose to a ghost which a hen has "laid" at your barn-door.

"It's an unknown quantity," said the mathematical Sabina, "whether, if we once get in there, we shall ever give that old boat of ours (now resting peacefully in that boat-shed over there) the 'long pull' the 'strong pull, and the 'all together pull' which is to bring us victoriously back to Richmond Bridge, where, let us hope, we shall find Aunt and Uncle Pipkin awaiting us; and others too," she added dreamily, then, yet more dreamily, "others too!"

Selina and I left her standing in the porch with her "others." Selina rang the bell briskly, and I took a preliminary rush round the garden with Tintoretto on my shoulder. I always like to see the back of a house, for this reason—if the back is all right, be sure the front is superlatively all right. The backs of anything, from a house to a life, are the best introductions to the front rooms.

Selina rang three times before we had an answer. At last a very stout, ringleted woman with a black satin gown (why do landladies always go for black satin?) and a cap decorated with wallflowers and long grasses, on which spangled insects danced the dance of selection of the fittest, appeared. She gave us the in-and-out stare of the appraiser, and her right eye, which was entirely out of accord with the left, glanced scorn at Tintoretto, who was still on my shoulder.

"What rooms have you?" said Selina.

Now Selina's manner will carry her anywhere. She can assume the air of a Lord Chief Justice in petticoats if necessary, and she can look as completely mistress of the situation as a big knowledge of life can alone give you. She has that peculiar form of knowledge which

has been wittily enough called saving knowledge. Selina knows not only how to butter her bread, but how to butter it with the best of butter, got just 12. a pound less than anybody else. She knows absolutely the best cut off a sheep or a bullock. She can inform the butcher. Whew! I am amazed at her. It's intuitive; it must be intuitive, because I'm certain she has never been in a slaughter-house. The butchers respect Selina; she is in the know.

"Show us your rooms," said Selina, with just the *souffçon* of a brush past that black satin, the ringlets, and the cap.

The landlady shrank up and dwindled down into her most communicative and amiable self. She dropped a profound curtsy, and said:

"This way, ladies."

"I must have a bedroom facing south," said Selina.

"Mr. Christian, the architect, says we live just ten years longer if we select rooms facing south and build houses facing south. I can't sleep unless I face south. From Southdown mutton to a south aspect, I'm purely on the side of the south."

"Just what the Hereditary Grand Dook said. His Hereditary Highness is now in occupation of the best bedroom. His Hereditary is here for quiet; he is writing a book."

"Ah!" said Selina. "Well, what other rooms have you?"

"The Greek gentleman has just gone; he had the bedroom and sitting-room which faces south-west, and there's the little dressing-room off, which his valet had."

"Tintoretto and I will do very well there," I said eagerly; for if there is a thing I hate it's sharing the nocturnal peculiarities of Selina or Sabina. Sleep a wink you can't. There are nightmarers, there are dreamers,

there are sleep-walkers, there are snorers, there are the folks who tow the counterpanes off, and rush the eider-down quilts away, and there are the folks who heap blankets on, and pack and tuck themselves up as if complete oblivion has set in with unconditional surrender all round.

Selina again said :

"Show us the rooms," and in single file we followed the landlady up two flights of stairs.

"This is the room just vacated by the Greek gentleman," said Mrs. Harbottle ; for that was her name.

I looked at Selina, Selina looked at Sabina, and Sabina looked at me, while Tintoretto jumped off my shoulder and went into the corner by the dressing-table, and watched some invisible smell ; for I conclude the scent of a mouse to a cat is as the scent of a rose to us.

O that Greek gentleman !

Cedars of Lebanon and spices of Parnassus, it was nutmeg with a vengeance !

Sabina began to "shake" ; as for Selina, she stood over the bed frowning and sniffing (it's no use mincing matters when writing the absolute truth about things, as I am). She got her brows together in one deep enforced line, and she seemed to me to tower over some invisible Greek gentleman and blow him into the Archipelago.

"He was the most highly suggestive creation," she said at last, "that ever set up the standard of fragrance in human spices or blown from coral reefs. He has left an undying memory behind him. For the sake of Greeks and ancient Medes in general, we must do our little best to get rid of him. Good madam, your rooms are haunted ! No, no, don't look alarmed—I mean by nothing more serious than the 'odes' of Greece. Let us throw wide the windows and get the nodding lime-trees out there in the garden to nod in here. Let"

(here she paused and meditatively examined the counterpane, put up her upper lip, and drew down her under lip in a fashion peculiar to herself)—“let us forget Greek and Latin, and thank God we are Saxons, lovers of soap-and-water, and ardent admirers of the Order of the Bath!”

“Hot water at seven-thirty every morning,” said Mrs. Harbottle, who only caught the concluding sentence. “Hot and cold laid on. His Hereditary Highness is most comfortable.”

“We are boating women,” said Selina, “as I daresay you have concluded from our appearance. We only require the rooms till to-morrow; we hope to be off soon after sunrise.”

“Is your boat here?” said Mrs. Harbottle, excitedly. “I’m sure it will be quite an honour to have put up three ladies rowing themselves like three men! I must tell his Hereditary Highness about this. He thinks a deal of our English ladies. He says German ladies are comprised of two classes—cooks and princesses; and he says he doesn’t know which takes his fancy most.”

“Have you given him an hereditary grand sausage for breakfast?” said I. “He couldn’t write on anything better than that—I think you said he was an author?”

“Most pleasant gentleman to do for,” said the landlady; “but I always have pleasant people here. Don’t know how it is.”

After this we felt we must enroll ourselves among the pleasant people. If there exists a person on earth who should be as cheese to mice ’tis a landlady to her patrons. She has to trap them and devour them, and reset her trap day by day. She has to learn human nature from A. to Z., and smile the eternal smile of welcome at the lean purse of A., who pays better than the fat purse of

Z., who respects his banking account too much because it is heavy to use it liberally, while A. respects his too little because it is light to use it meanly. Motive rolls remorselessly on, and plays sad havoc with our good and evil. Sometimes I think Motive must have the smile of a cynic.

Sabina Ann proposed a moonlight stroll, and Selina and I were in no mood to dispute the wishes of Sabina; so, after that dreadful meal called a high tea—"low tea" I should call it; it always makes me ill. It's not its rusticity, for I admire rusticity; it's an atmosphere about high tea I never could stand. The cutlets look so flat at the teapot, and the teapot looks so disgusted at the cutlets, and the hostess looks so completely out of it all round, and the general company so completely bewildered between sweets and meats and forks and spoons and knives galore, that it's enough to make anybody go off in a cunningly devised hypnotic swoon, so as to be removed from the scene of that daring attempt at a compromise with your neighbour's stomach, high tea!—we went out.

Selina was for just taking a peep at the boat to see it was all right. She talked of it as if it were a baby in a cradle. She hoped the old man would look after it. Was it under the shed? Were the cushions turned over? Then she kept on about the apparatus for holding the kettle. Was that secured? Finally, why hadn't we the common sense to insure the boat? "Why, that old man and his pipe may set it on fire! Who knows? Who knows, indeed, what pranks an old man with a pipe mayn't get up to?" She went on working Sabina and me up to such a pitch that at last we sprang to our feet and stuck on our hats, and flew madly off in the direction of the boathouse, followed by Tintoretto, who can run, walk, and trot like a dog. In fact, Tintoretto's mother

was a cat which, when it met a tragic end by the tooth of a chow dog, was attested to by a retired unbeneficed clergyman as having walked between his legs up and down the narrow strip of garden (which is the portion in Maida Vale) for years without number. There are cats and there are cats, and you won't match my Tintoretto in a hurry. Not that anything ever is matched in a hurry, according to my experience.

We all agreed how delightful it was to be out of those stuffy apartments, and we wondered why apartments always are stuffy. Selina said she thought it was the fault of the landladies. They gave themselves every sort of air except the air of heaven; and as a race she detested them—landladies and pew-openers. She went on to say that the beckoning finger of a pew-opener (if it was almost a thing of the past) had left an undying impression on her—the finger of ill-directed patronage and unseemly greed. She said the “itching palm” and the “tickled ear” had gone out simultaneously. She had noticed it; and not only she, but a cousin who had just arrived from India after many years' absence had remarked the same thing. From this Selina drifted into a humorous description of cousins and uncles home from India after long absences.

“Come back,” she said, “looking like baked apples, and with the same amount of mind with which they went out. No growth whatever intellectually. Dwarfs—mental dwarfs. Pretty girl on the brain when they go out; pretty girl on the brain when they come back! Ask all round, ‘How old are you now?’ and give a tabulated statement of the exact age of each member of the home brigade. ‘Cousin Lavinia is forty-two (I know all about it)—forty-two. Kept those eyes (I remember them of old). Cousin Lauretta looks a bit matronly. Yes. O, we see the difference. Saw Aunt Patty. Very

shaky—very shaky indeed ! As for me—old married man—grown-up sons and daughters. Wife retained her figure admirably—admirably. Detest this climate. Miss my Indian luxuries. Somebody there—nobody here ! Marry my daughters out there ? No, indeed ! Men come home now to find a wife.' And then the cousin from India calculates exactly if two cheroots will carry him safely back to Eastbourne, from whence he has travelled to look up his relatives and take the conceit out of them."

We found the old boatman just standing where we left him, pipe in mouth, hands in pockets, and boat idly rocking up and down on the nerveless tide. For how nerveless seemed the river ! Motionless it lay ; still, with the stillness known only to strength.

A full moon bathed her laughing face in the gleaming fringes of its tuneful ripple. Stars looked down and wondered in its deep all-remembering bosom. O River, take unto you a voice, and speak as a man would speak—a man who had somehow the voice of a god, and knew all things and understood all things. Tell us the secret of your gigantic strength and your mysterious weakness. Strength when to go with you, to fly with you, is all you ask from us children of men ; and tell us again the wherefore of your sullen moods, when nerve and sinew must be strained to their utmost to make headway against your desire to drive us back, back, back to that spot from which we started so hopefully but yesterday. Tell us the sweet madness of many a love-song to which your ear alone has listened, as the full heart of man poured out its ineffable longings in the poor broken words of passion, which was heaven-born if it was worth or worthy the all-listening ear of the sweet old river, the mighty river Thames. Tell us again of the sighs which have breathed themselves out of the tortured spirits of sad hearts as the triumphant note of the river found no

response in their down-trodden lives, and as if drawn to it because of its very triumph and the mighty rush of its inspiring song, thundering down the weirs and tumbling on, on, on. They, sad souls, stretched out longing arms to its rushing tumultuous life, and gave themselves to its embrace, thinking death, perchance, now kinder, ay, kindest, and the river the sweet, kind, cruel river. The solemn, mournful triumphant river, its song is full of the lives of those whom it has known from first to last. For the river is to man both a parable of life and death, and its voice is the voice of a parable, and in parables alone—yes, alone—it speaketh.

There was just a sigh among the river sedges and the river grasses—that lovely quivering sigh which is known to Nature—tremulous, eloquent, pregnant. The sigh carried all that the river had to say; the river speaks in the whisper of the sedges and the grasses.

It was Selina who awoke me from my Rousseau-like dreams. I have always understood Rousseau's love of Nature. Some people seem to me to be made out of Nature more than human nature. Don't attempt to follow me when I'm metaphysical. Leave that for the schools. For all I know, you may be like the farmer's wife who said she really did sometimes look up at them stars, and wonder if they sold butter up there or made cheese. She apologised, did that farmer's wife, for looking up, as much as to say 'twas decidedly her business to look down. Ten toes, planted firmly on *terra firma*, are more exciting to observe gyrating than ten stars twinkling on a blue platform called heaven! There are plenty of farmers' wives about, though they don't all sell butter and eggs. Some wear coronets! Does this seem strange to you? Truth is stranger than fiction, and there's more butter and eggs about than you may be aware of—a great deal more.

"Surely you haven't been standing here all this time?" said Selina to the boatman. "Been home and had a cup of tea, and all that, I suppose?"

"Been home? yes. My old missus would take on fine if I didn't go home. Been home? yes; and seen William Jacobs' new suit of clothes lying on the floor idle—the suit which come by parcel post for the funeral of his aunt. Did he put it on? Not he. Too swinish to open it. Gone to the readin' of the will, and the certainty of falling into a tidy bit of money in the old clothes in which he drives the Osborne breed of cows to and fro and to and fro. Sykes! he's a queer 'un, is William Jacobs. He lodges with my missus and me. William never cleans his flesh. Dabs his finger in a drop of water and pats his hair; then dabs again and wets his face, and then tips his fingers. That's William all over. I speak openly, ladies, for I'm worried. Suits of clothes and mentioning in wills come to the worthless. Invariable, invariable. It's all a toss—all a toss. That old bull with a ring in its nose in that field to the left has just as much chance of being mentioned as left to me for slaughter this side Christmas, as I have of being mentioned in the readin' of that will to which William Jacobs has taken off this day."

Sabina said what a vulgar low thing was grumbling—this when Selina's mind was fully set at rest as to the safety of the boat, and also when she had secured the air cushion, which she said would require refilling before starting to-morrow. I do so dislike air cushions. Not long ago I saw a leading counsel with one, and I thought what an old woman he must be to sit on an air cushion. Anyhow, he must be always *en l'air*.

We hung about the river till it blew a great mist about us, and coiled and wound its mighty arms around us and bade us begone:

"For health is not in me now when the vapours torment me; and those children of mine, those microbes, rheumatism, sciatica, and fretful neuralgia, are born of me. Heaven knows I would repudiate my microbes if I could; but I can't. I bear them for my sins, I suppose. Begone, my lady scullers! begone from my banks to the haunted house yonder, encircled with its aureole of laurels! You don't know what I know—how should you? She told the river her sad tale, and she returns sometimes to the spot where— What did I say? Hush! When the moon clouds her face I stop talking. My tides are bound up with the moon: she is my divinity."

CHAPTER VII.

WE HAVE A DREADFUL NIGHT.—WE SEE AND HEAR
STRANGE THINGS.

JUST as we turned up the lane, on our way to our apartments, Sabina Ann gave an awful jump. She jumps exactly like a frog, low in the air, and with a fall back, as if she was resting. Selina is not at all nervous, neither am I particularly so; but we all took to shying into the hedge, after that horrid jump of Sabina Ann's.

"Well, what is it?" I said crossly, after a dead silence of several seconds, during which time my heart bumped against my ribs till I thought it would burst.

"Tush!" said Selina, "it's those horrid country bumpkin lovers again. There they are! silent as the dead. Why don't they speak—out of a full heart? Well, at least they are harmless, poor demented souls. Shoulder up, Sabina Ann, and don't be so absurdly nervous. What will you be like as an old woman? Cultivate a calm and impassive bearing; learn control; be as I am!"

It's my way to be always making observations. I don't know when I'm making them ; for observation is part of my life. Observation leads to deduction, and deduction leads on to reaches quite out of the ordinary beat, so I won't go into that ; but it was certainly curious of Selina to think I had not noticed her frantic plunge into the hedge.

Sabina can hold her own—a somewhat uncommon virtue ; for it needs a great deal of experience to hold your own in a world like this. I wonder if it would be easier to hold one's own in the planet Mars, for instance, peopled as it is—according to the last Paris scientific observations, made by means of photography—with people twelve feet high—far, far in advance of us in every way ? But that might easily be ; for I'm sure, every day that I live, I become more than ever convinced of our terrible savagery and ignorance about all things, from religion to politics. When the Archbishop of Canterbury folded his hands and gave the blessing over the fuss about candles and postures the other day, I also folded my hands, and said to myself, “We fight about a candle, as if, amid the awful realities, such matters were worth contending over ! How do they worship—those twelve-feet high people in Mars—I wonder ? Do they wrangle and persecute up there ? ”

But to return to Sabina Ann. She was facing Selina with her very direct gaze. Sabina Ann has large powerful eyes ; you don't get away from them ; they career over you, and keep on absorbing you into that invisible self which is Sabina Ann. That's clumsy, I know, but I don't know that it's much more so than much else that's tortuously difficult.

Well, Sabina Ann had fixed Selina with her eyes, and Selina didn't like it. That is how Sabina Ann holds

her own, and will hold her own, till her eyes creep away to the "backs"—a way eyes have when we grow old.

"Well, well, well!" said Selina, "we are three cowards, I take it!" And she laughed; and then we all laughed, and then started at our laughter, and so we reached our rooms.

It was quite delightful to see Mrs. Harbottle (the landlady) standing in the passage to greet us. I think we must have been feeling that odd, queer feeling which we call loneliness creeping over us, for we all greeted her with effusion.

We were so glad to get back! and we would have some tea; and had she night-lights? and would she be sure to call us at six on the morrow? and we were going to try the piano—it looked extremely good, and so on.

Mrs. Harbottle panted up-stairs behind us, and turned up the gas in the sitting-room, and opened the piano, and drew down the blinds, and said:

"The Hereditary was dining, and would, she was certain, enjoy the music. In his Schloss near Baden-Baden, he had told her, he had his own band. He said it was the fashion to think that German princes could not do things in style; but, '*Donner und Blitzen!*' it was there things were done in style. 'Where is your Sovereign's own band?' The bands of the entire Army belong to our Queen, as I told his Hereditary; but he said, shaking his finger in my face:

"'*I* had my own; I composed my own music, and they play it—play it,' he said, 'as only Germans can play! Large movements—wide—big—thoughtful!'

"Dear me, ladies!" she continued, "how I should like his Hereditary"—sometimes she called him *E*reditary, sometimes *Hi-Hi-Hi*ereditary, sometimes Heredit~~y~~, and sometimes Eredit~~y~~—"to see you three fine ladies! Now there, I should!"

The discreet Mrs. Harbottle was too clever, too old a hand, to wait and hear our answer : she knew, what we all knew, that doubtful matters are best allowed to sink into the mind, and come up full-blown, as assents or dissents. She just waddled off with a side-glance at Selina, who was arranging her pigtails at a horrible mirror, with its distorted representations of things, animate and inanimate. That mirror was exactly like an old gossip that I know, who distorts truth till it looks like a lie (which is the way of things in this world). Selina it was who took up the parable.

"What did dear, cross, humorous, torturous old Carlyle say about the 'tongues of innumerable old women'? If he hadn't been smothered in his own cleverness, I think he hits off things as they are better than anybody I ever came across. Most decidedly! Mrs. Harbottle shall introduce the Hi-Hi-Hi-reditary. I believe he's a convict escaped from Portsmouth. Whoever heard of a Grand Ducal Sausage galore in apartments at Sunbury? Where is the accompanying demon? Why, the gentleman has no attendant! He must be awfully 'sane' to be permitted to rove about like this. These Hereditary gentlemen are scarce here, if they are frequent there." And Selina was vulgar enough to throw her thumb over her shoulder at an invisible Continent.

"If," said Sabina Ann oracularly—"if the innumerable tongues of the innumerable old women who were—or was it lived?—in the mind of Thomas Carlyle, late Sage of Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, ever did one any good, then would I treat them (the tongues) with the respect due to all potted meats; but"—and here Sabina Ann flung a glance at the chandelier (a very grand discarded thing, with long glass curls, which had come out of Hampton Court Palace, we heard afterwards)—"but there is not a five-pound note to be got out of those

innumerable tongues, and that's why I hate them, and have given and will give them all the go-by. Tongues inspired and tongues uninspired all chant the same note when you come to ask them for a five-pound note or a note for 5,000/. I have scant respect for the tongues of the innumerable, and you will never know what the soul of freedom is till"—and here Sabina's great black eyes flamed—"till you respect yourself, and give the innumerable tongues the complete go-by. Then, and then only, can you rise to be what you are, true to yourself—whatever," she added softly, "that self may be."

"Well done, Sabina Ann!" said I. "The kingdom of women has yet to come, as we sang a little while ago on the river to the old gentleman with the gnat charity or 'Home for Gnats,' not on the brain but in open-mouthed expectancy. If there was a House of Ladies as well as a House of Lords, I think we could pass a few Bills, and end by making the men more than ever in love with us by our nice little discriminating sense of the needs of our time."

"Could you see members of the House of Ladies, or School Board ladies, nursing a baby?" said Selina, looking rather idiotic at the moment, I must own.

Sabina Ann got hold of a dreadful antimacassar (of all horrors), rolled it up into a neat ball, and flung it at Selina's head, and said:

"That's a wide question—a question the next century must answer. I'm not likely to be in it, and so don't care. All I care about is this wonderful introduction—through a landlady, of all people—to the Hi—Hi—Hire-ditary."

The piano, a really good one, stood open, and Selina sat down and commenced to play. Now the piano is, of all instruments, the perhaps most difficult, because, unless handled with the handling of a genius, it is so

horribly vulgar. We all know the strum of the commonplace soul, and the "pickings" at the keys of the half-educated ; for it requires heaven-born knowledge to play the piano ; it (the piano) knows how to play with you a great deal better, as a rule, than you know how to play on it. The piano is like the world, after all. You must master it, or it will master you.

Selina is superb at the piano. She just sits down, like that Russian—what's his name?—Pad—something, and converts earth into a heaven of sound. Who her composers are you never dream of asking. You are taken clean out of those stupid questions. You sit back in your chair and close your eyes (if you like it best), and you (if, of course, you are a susceptible instrument to higher influences) let yourself go.

Sabina Ann sat with her toes on the fender, just as if she was sitting before a fire listening. I sat at the round table with my arms resting on it, and head bowed in silent rapture, when Mrs. Harbottle burst into the room.

"Forgive ! pardon ! ladies. The Ducal—his Highness says he never heard such playing ; he never heard such a touch. May he come and express his admiration ? May he——"

Selina's hands were resting on the keys ; that peculiar force which the Polish people call "Zäll" had lighted each feature in her always expressive face. It was Selina with a halo about her.

"Yes ! yes ! yes !" said she ; "bring him up. Why not ? Three women afloat in a boat, Yo-ho ! are prepared for anything and everything—princes in disguise, or convicts in disguise, or ghosts habited in the flesh, and spirits disembodied of the flesh. Bring him up, by all means."

CHAPTER VIII.

WE CONTINUE AMONG THE DUCAL DUKES AND THE
GHOSTAL GHOSTS.

DID anybody personally described either in a book or an advertisement ever in any way answer to the description when seen in the flesh? I'm sure I don't know how to describe this ducal gentleman who sought admission with a "H-m!" outside the door and a timid knock. He (the Ducal) had got rid of Mrs. Harbottle; it was very unkind of him. I thought I heard a sort of retreating scuffle of black cashmere boots somewhere, and a "Certainly, your Highness, certainly"—echo: "Certainly, certainly."

"Come in!" said Selina, and come in he did.

Well, I will try and describe him. He was tall, very tall, miserably tall I call it, for he had gone creeping on after that lamp-post till the lamp-post had evidently said to him, "Go on, go on, and leave me behind. I'm tall enough to light the little folks below me about. Let your own planet light you about." He was thin, miserably thin I called it. No membraneous receptacles—nothing of the kind. Depression—total, absolute, undeniable. The markets of the world knew him not. The flesh of bulls was strange unto him. General bankruptcy all round was the outside envelope. His hair—well, what there was of it—was neatly arranged, economically managed. His eyes were small, disgustingly small, because small eyes belong to the genus pig only, and whatever "his Ducal" was, he was not a pig.

His mouth—it just walloped and lolloped, and left you no hope of his formulating nervous speech. His

nose—well, it was utterly insignificant; it seemed to have settled on his face in an absent sort of way, and there remained, too unworthy of his notice or anybody else's to take flight.

He bowed, and he bowed again; and he bowed and he bowed again. The mouth that walloped and lolloped began to speak, and the little tiny eyes to twinkle.

"Fräuleins! English ladies, I could not resist the music. Music is to me what it was and is to the old serpent—music is to me a charm; music draws my fangs. I cease to have a fang in me when I listen to such a touch as just now made these walls tremble and speak, and will leave for ever an undying volume of sound somewhere. The nation to which I have the honour to belong is a musical nation. It was the Fräulein at the piano who played?" He twinkled at Selina and bowed again, and then he made a horrid grinding noise—something wrong somewhere, I fancy; I don't know—and said, "The English lady is to me the embodiment of the eternal 'She,' whom we authors endeavour to portray, from your Rider Haggard, with his pen steeped in magic, to the done-up authors who hold on till, by virtue of natural selection, they must give out."

The Ducality was standing and holding on to the round table as he talked, and his head was careering far away beyond the ringletted glass chandelier. There was a large continent of water indicated on the ceiling, and pointing to a broken pipe somewhere, and on this continent the Hereditary now fixed his eyes. Where he fixed them there they grew, and developed images which he flung off in random shots of talk. Now and then his hands got away from clutching the table, and he worked his fingers nervously, and roosted first on one leg and then on the other. We were all arrested by him, he was so uncommon.

Selina's hands still hovered over the piano. Certainly Selina looked wondrously handsome; at moments she does. She is very provoking; her beauty is so entirely momentary and dependent on moods. I think her beauty is like inspiration. I am sure the Hereditary saw it; for once or twice he removed his eyes from the unhappy continent on the ceiling to the face of Selina, and on each occasion he dropped the thread of his argument, and said, "*Donner und blitzen.*"

Sabina Ann is always kind when it costs her nothing. Perhaps it's rather hard of me to say this of Sabina Ann, whom I delight in almost as much as I delight in Selina; but nevertheless it is a fact. She slid a chair for the Hereditary to sit upon—rather cruel to "sit upon" our kind friends the chairs—and he sank into it with unaffected gratitude, murmuring little apologetic nothings.

He seemed thoroughly happy. I think he had what Pope Gregory calls "the terrible gift of familiarity." Extremes meet; the highest and the lowest have it. Mediums know it not. The high arrive at it because they know so much, and the low because they know so little. The mediums arrive at no conclusions, because they are half-educated in all things, and are too proud or too conceited to ask; hence the inanity of most medium-class society.

"You are aware that this house is haunted?" he said suddenly—"that's why I am here. I seek out haunted people and haunted houses for my books. I am like the Queen of Roumania—I like to be in seclusion now and then to attach to myself the Muses and the"—he paused and gathered his feet away from the other end of the room, where they had wandered, such was the enormous length of him—"Graces."

"The Muses will be sufficient for your Highness, I

am sure," said Selina. "The Graces would be confusion worse confounded."

The Hereditary smiled, if opening and shutting your mouth and saying "Ha!" is smiling. Then he rose. It was a rising. Up, up he towered.

"Ladies," he said, "the grace and the charm of you will expel the ghost. Such music," he continued, turning to Selina, "must lay her. Yes, it will lay her. May I just for one minute try your piano?"

Selina rushed off the stool and sat on a chair near him, almost facing him; anyhow, where he could turn his head at her now and again, after the German style. Sabina Ann and I withdrew to a distant sofa at the other end of the room. All I can say is, if his books play on the feelings of his readers as his music played on our feelings, the result will be such a rush on the book market the publishers will be grovelling at the Hi-Hi-Hi-editary toes. He played exactly like an antediluvian old maid—all pirouettes, twirls, and skirts, held out with an eye to showing how many breadths it (the skirt) held. Twirl and whirl, and whirl and twirl, and throwing up his eyes as if he were repudiating proposals (of any kind you like to imagine) by the hundred.

Sabina Ann got hold of one of Mrs. Harbottle's red velveteen cushions and doubled it up into the shape of a sausage, and threatened, with pantomimic gestures, to throw it at his exalted back. I held her in, suffocating with laughter. We wrestled over that red velveteen cushion I believe, for ten minutes, while our Grand Ducal acquaintance played to his own Muse—his own inward Muse.

At last the grandfather-clock on the landing struck ten, and the slow, solemn, rebuking note of the grand old clock-man mingled with a measure he had just wandered into. The Ducal got up on his legs as if shocked.

"Ten o'clock! Forgive me! I beg most profoundly to thank you young ladies for a charming evening. Never have I enjoyed myself more; never shall I enjoy myself more! Your simple, happy ways, your exuberant spirits have made me in accord with this old dull world. I had thought of cremation about an hour ago, now I think of—O, never mind what I think of! What would this world be without the eternal 'She'? Adieu, demoiselles! Adieu, ladies!"

Bow, bow, repeated bow. Back, backing, repeated and accentuated trippings! He was gone.

He was gone; but not without one glance at Selina from those little pig eyes, which it wanted Miss Pipkin to decipher. Highty-tighty; flirty-flighty! Was he morganatically in earnest.

"I like him," said Selina, as the door closed, I like him hugely. He is hideously ugly; but what of that? He has a hunch."

"But no body," I said.

"Bother the body!" said Selina. "You can't talk with a body, you talk with a mind. It is hard on the mind to have to carry about so extraordinary a body; but I like him."

Selina was again at the glass, and flinging about her pigtails quite recklessly. Her colour, too, was quite brilliant. Woman-like, she had imagined that there was admiration in the air; and if doctors could prescribe proposals as readily as their medicines, there would be less illness about in some quarters—much less.

"He is old, dreadfully old," I said gloomily; "horridly old!"

"Only a little old, as somebody said of a pheasant," said Selina. "I have never had that aversion to the old which is characteristic of you, Phoebe; there is no veneration in your ill-shaped head."

"Selina," I said, "who lives more among old curiosities than I do? But I do not want to marry an old curiosity!"

Selina began to heave like a bark on the ocean—she always rocks when she laughs—and Sabina Ann began to crow like a cock at break of day.

How delicious is laughter! it doeth good like medicine. Laugh and grow fat; laugh and grow kind; laugh and forget your banker's book; laugh and make humorous kindly game of your enemies (if you have any); game-pie, any sort of pie but that dreadful pie which calls everybody a wandering star reserved for the darkness and blackness of wrath to come who does not agree with you.

"Nightlights," said I, as I gathered up Tintoretto. "They are what I call invalid geniuses; still, there is some knowledge of surrounding objects to be had out of them. Let's have two a-piece."

"O dear!" groaned Selina; "and I have to encounter that awful bed with its 'odes of Greece!' What courage life needs! I never got into a bed, either in apartments or hotels, without feelings best left unmentioned before an unfeeling world. O dear! O dear!"

By this time we were all gambolling up the broad old-fashioned staircase, which creaked as we moved, and repeated our footsteps with quite an octave of solemn sounds. Tintoretto's great green eyes were shining like stars, and her fur looked rather what I should call on end. At the top of the staircase long narrow galleries branched off to the right or left; numerous doors indicated numerous bedrooms. It was a very big rambling old place, and must, in past years, have belonged to people of consideration—or shall we say the house was worthy of consideration, while probably the people were not?

The sitting-room, which we had just left, had evidently been furnished out of auction-rooms by Mr. Harbottle; everything there was veneer and jimcracks of one sort and another; but, incongruously enough, about the landings there were pieces of tattered old tapestry-hangings, representations of scenes of a bygone age. I stood to admire a gallant with a hawk; it was all very dim, but my imagination helped it out.

I pulled aside the tapestry, and saw what looked like a walled-up door behind it. Over this door there was an old carved coat-of-arms in oak, and a motto in French: "Pour vous mais non pour moi."

"Where does that door lead to?" I said. "Can it possibly be a secret way down to the river? It is evidently a door, is it not?" I continued, and I pushed it with my hands. To my amazement it gave way almost noiselessly, and glided back after the fashion of a sliding panel. Selina was holding the candle aloft. We neither of us in our surprise uttered a word; for, facing us, two steps down, was a sitting-room, and in that sitting-room, sitting with her head in her hands, was what looked like a very tall old woman in a poke-bonnet and long black cloak.

Seeing her sitting there in such apparent distress of mind, and startled as we were at our entrance into this unsuspected room, either Selina or I murmured something like an apology. Reader, the dead need no apologies. We addressed the living dead.

I can't say we saw her face, for as we spoke she vanished! Thin grey air gathered in a cloud where she had sat, and slowly and solemnly just dispersed. That was all.

I turned to Selina; she was trembling violently.

"Come away! Don't you see it's—it's—it's——"

A breath of cold air, cold as ice, colder than the touch

of an Arctic breath borne on the wave of an Arctic sea, swept past us. It extinguished the candle, and left us helplessly groping in utter darkness !

CHAPTER IX.

WE CALMLY DISCUSS THE OLD WOMAN IN THE LONG BLACK CLOAK AND POKE-BONNET. WE REALLY SAW HER, BEING, AS WE ARE, THREE OF THE MOST UNIMAGINATIVE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.

"HAVE you a match?" Sabina spoke as calmly as if we were in the midst of ordinary surroundings. She is a capital little stand-by woman, holding her nerves as some people hold money—wisely and well. "If so," she continued, "strike it. Here! hand the box to me, Phoebe Winter." (Winter is my surname; I think that's why I am so passionately fond of summer.) "Play the woman! Selina, we expect you to collapse; you great big fine women always do, while we little squibs——"

"Sabina," said I indignantly, "when we measured at Girton you know well where you were. Your self-complacency will carry you through everything, even through the unbecomingness of a poke-bonnet. What a poke-bonnet our Ghost wears!"

From all this you will gather we managed to comport ourselves with some dignity under the circumstances, and were in some sort equal to the occasion.

The candle lighted, Sabina seized it from Selina and held it aloft. She looked quite imposing with it held high above her head, and the slanting rays emanating from it beaming pallidly down on her eager face. At all times Sabina Ann has a face from which you would expect something. Thought has worked its way into each feature; it is at moments even a powerful face, but the possessing powers that reign are rather small and inquisitorial. She

is never big and charmingly break-your-bank generous. If Sabina opens her purse she knows exactly how much she has in it, and how much she is going to take out of it. She wouldn't throw it at you and say, "I hope there is something in it which will make it worthy of you and of me." Not she! She has a horrid Pharisaical way, too, of talking of morals, as if morals were all rolled up in her little bit of parchment; and every now and then she will look at me as if I hadn't a moral (not one) to bless myself with. When she looks like that I let her have it.

"Sabina Ann, you are like the town clerk at Ephesus—upon my word you are, only you haven't his position."

Our scrutiny embraced the room; we flared the candle first into one corner and then into another, and where we flared it there we peered. What we saw was this: a square-shaped room with diamond panes, through which the ascending moon now looked with a long high stare—cold, hard, indifferent. I know nothing in the world of Nature that can look so superlatively indifferent as a moon which is soaring upward with a light breeze after it. Cry to it? O, the indifference! The moon has the mood now and then of a maiden who listens to the entreaties of her would-be lover with a mocking smile. To her, love—what is it? A Latin prayer in the ear of a peasant.

Black clouds now and then rushed gustily over its still face, then massed and fled on, like scouts doing the bidding of the invisible hierarchies.

The furniture was all of a bygone century, and belonged to the stiffest of stiff periods. Hard lines, ungraceful indications of what had but half formulated itself in the mind of the workers in wood, brass, and stone of that century. There was a small round table, not exactly Royal-looking. There was a bedstead with a canopy,

and arms—the motto, “Pour vous, mais pas pour moi,” again figuring. There was also something lying on the bed. Sabina went up to it, cool as a cucumber. (Delicious old simile !)

“H’m! A black cloak, is it? Double-hooded too! Artful old woman! Old, ugly, and artful, as my brother is always saying. What next? a poke-bonnet! Well, I have seen the pig in the poke; it only remained to see the old woman in the poke, and Sabina Ann takes her place among the prophets. Now that old woman was sitting in that cloak and bonnet a few minutes ago in that chair,” (pointing at it). “What an old fidget to take it off so soon! It’s the fashion to live in bonnets and hats.”

“Sabina Ann, I feel so faint. Do be quiet.” It was Selina; her hand was clasped tight on her side, and she certainly looked very pale.

“Don’t be a donkey; it’s your poor liver again. Nervousness is all liver.”

“Little materialistic monster,” said Selina, immediately firing; “you know we saw a ghost. Heaps of people have seen them, but, for fear of being laughed at by the stupid who believe in nothing, from a ghost to a dinner at the Mansion House, won’t, won’t let on.”

Facing the sliding-panel at which we had entered was an old mouldy oak door with a knocker, and two panes of glass let in in a mode in vogue centuries ago.

Selina’s nose was flattened against one of those panes, and she declared that she saw a long, winding, tree-begirt alley, which wound on and on to the river.

“So,” said she, “the ghost is a river lady! She comes up from the river, depend on it, and to the river she returns. There was some river tragedy, I suppose, in which she took her part.”

We discussed her a little longer, and then, in a rather

mixed bundle of three, got to the doorway, and so to our bedroom.

We had a dreadful night ; that house at Sunbury is horribly haunted, I am certain of it. Boxes were dragged up and down the broad staircase for hours by invisible hands. Selina vowed that a cold finger was laid on her forehead, and Sabina declared that a hand with big knuckles had dragged at the bedclothes. Tintoretto was occupied all night, to my certain knowledge, with watching at a hole for a mouse that never came ; and I, worn out at last, did, I most solemnly declare, get up and invoke those ghosts in these words :

“Whoever you are, wherever you are, and whatever you are, I command you to cease this noise, and get you gone !” and I do hereby declare that an intense stillness thereafter fell upon the house, and when Mrs. Harbottle called us at the hour at which we had earnestly invoked her, we were all as cross as Tintoretto at being disturbed, and abused her as a tiresome person who hated to think others were slumbering when she was working about and “doing” for you.

CHAPTER X.

WE RACE WITH THE PECKSNIFF'S DREAM.

SABINA ANN was frightfully impatient to be off the next morning. She said she feared catarrhal fever was coming on ; she felt very queer. Tintoretto must be related to that fever. I wonder if the doctors have investigated its origin and connection with Tintoretto in general ? She said she had no intention of being laid up or laid by in apartments. No, she would rather stick by the boat to the end if the end was coming ; and here she sneezed in a sudden and disgracefully loud ill-bred

manner, which horrified Selina and me. Really, if people have colds the best place is decidedly their private rooms; they are not fit for society, being full of catarrhal infection, and they are hardly fit for their own, between sneezing and coughing.

"For Heaven's sake, don't be so depressing, Sabina," said Selina at last; "you run down like a thermometer. We shall be ready to start in a few minutes; for my part I'm in no such desperate hurry. The day is young and the river is old, so the one can wait and the other has learnt to wait."

"I long for a breath of air," said Sabina. "My hands are like fire; do feel them."

"I shall send for Dr. Octavius Darling if you go on like this," said Selina. "I shall not feel your hand or your pulse. You are perfectly well. Your eyes are bright. Your colour is good, and you are just catching at ailments, unworthy of a boating woman, to hurry Phoebe and me away from these apartments, and to stay, goodness knows what a pleasant little episode, among the waste places of earth, for perchance one of us. I don't say me, I don't say you, and I don't say Phoebe."

"Well, it can't be all three of us," I said; "the romance will have to be localised somewhere."

"Don't you know we started with one absorbing idea in our heads, and that was boating; to hang about in apartments is to stay action," said Sabina Ann, who was wandering aimlessly about the room. "Let us pack. I really feel unequal to the task, and beg of you both to put in my toothbrush, and my nightgown, and brush-bag; I'm particular over nothing else, unless it be my tooth-powder: when beauty fades there is nothing much left but the gleam on one's teeth. I feel very, very old and sunk down to-day, quite a wearied woman; I do really.

I can't think what is the matter with me. Just feel my hand, dear, dear Selina, do ; I am usually so 'spry.'"

"Very well, I will," said Selina ; and mind, you must do as I tell you."

By this time Sabina had got into the only comfortable chair in the room, the saddle-bag armchair, at which Mrs. Harbottle had triumphantly pointed when branching off (as she had branched) into the ethics of furniture. She lay back in it with an air of having the "pip" more than anything else. Selina stood towering over her, with her fingers on her pulse.

"Adipose secretion, causing an accelerated pulse," she said ; "violent exercise and unwonted bustling necessary. Packing the best of all possible cures. Get up and pack that portmanteau directly."

Then ensued a wrestling, bear-fighting arrangement only worthy of freshmen. Sabina flew round the table, followed by Selina ; they kicked over the footstools, and flung the velveteen cushions at each other's heads. It is not given to many to see two Girton girls behave as they did. My voice of remonstrance was drowned. I called up Uncle Pipkin and the incubating Miss Pipkin ; I admonished them in accents of heartrending entreaty, all to no purpose ! They continued to bear-fight, till I expected I know not what reprimand on their conduct from Mrs. Harbottle, who, however, feigned deafness, as King David feigned madness, I concluded, for she didn't appear ; but somebody else did, and that no less a person than the Hereditary Grand Ducal !

He burst in upon us, but without previous announcement, and, once in the room, he assailed our ears with such innumerable apologies for his boldness that we had not the heart to be angry.

"I knocked like one of your little maids-of-all-work would knock," he said humbly. "I knocked, and re-

knocked, but to no purpose. Finally, I made myself bold. I encouraged myself with that sublime thought, 'Fortune favours the brave'; I entered paradise; and, once in, fiends shan't turn me out, before, at least, I have presented each of you with a few flowers; the flowers speaking for me as only flowers can."

We wondered where the flowers were, but were not long kept in ignorance. The Hereditary legs transported the Hereditary body out of the room; in a few seconds he returned, laden with three huge bouquets, tied with ribbons red, white, and blue. Each bouquet was identically the same as the others; so was each bow. Honours were divided in this game of whist. He presented each bouquet with a falling bow, like the tumbling waters of a human Niagara, and said:

"You English people are to this day an heroic people, also an athletic people. I insist on the athletics. The oar is the national safeguard against that horrible luxury which overtook Rome and killed Greece. Athletic men, and athletic women, are always the best champions of the laws of health and purity. Whither, fair ladies of the oar, are you now wending your way? Mine hostess, the landlady, tells me you are going immediately."

"To Walton!" said Selina, a little hurriedly.

"To Chertsey!" said Sabina Ann, a little nervously.

"To Windsor!" said I pompously.

"Then the happy stars will bring us again together. I shall be due at the last place some day." Again he looked at Selina, who looked back at him, I thought a little indignantly. Three bouquets with three sets of ribbon were rather like three cheers for the red, white, and blue, but which was the favourite colour?

The bows of last night were then repeated, lacking, perhaps, a little of the fire of evening glow, and he was gone.

How happy could I be with either, Were t'other dear charmer away!" said Sabina tritely. "I believe it's me."

"Go to," said Selina. "'There is no fool like an old fool,' is an old-world proverb."

"Now, now, none of that," said I. "I'll back Sabina against anybody, if she means business."

"Which she doesn't," said Sabina (who was by now perfectly recovered). "Sabina is a free soul, who scorns all desire to get out of one boat into another. She is satisfied with her own position, fancy free, and maiden blush, and wouldn't be married to anything Hereditary for worlds."

"Wait!" said Selina. "Wait! wait!"

It's not often Selina looks so portentously prophetic. To take my readers into my confidence. Have you ever seen the face of the coming old woman look out of the face of the present-day young woman? That's what befell Selina. I saw Selina as she will be at ninety.

"My dear," I said, "it will be all right; it will be all right."

There is wonderful strength in somebody telling us "It will be all right." We have a yearning after our human prophets, and often and often that cheap saying, "It will be all right," has quickened our faith into a firm belief in an eternity of good. The odds are on the side of the good.

We packed the portmanteau between us, shying in the things, I'm afraid, anyhow. The hair-wash, of course, had got out and had soaked into Sabina's ridiculous pair of house-shoes, a pair of Paris shoes, with real diamond buckles, too!—no French paste—a present from Uncle Pipkin on the birthday of a new curry. Sabina put her hands up to her head, and ran round the room like a mad dog. But it was no good; the deed was done. The tooth-

powder, too, had gone astray, and had mixed itself with the hair-brushes.

"Let's shut up the things altogether," said Selina at last, "and strap them in, and do without one of them. I'm sick of the whole lot of them. I miss my maid; upon my word I do!"

"Now no airs and graces, or frills and tuckers," said I. "Maids were not 'made' for everybody, and in my opinion grown-up persons who can't dress themselves and pack themselves are children!"

"The child-woman, that's just what Selina is, after all," said Sabina. "Wheel her round the garden on Lucilla's grey horse." (Lucilla is Selina's niece.) "Now let us pay the landlady. Out with that brown purse of yours with its bulgy sides, and patent lock and key; you are paymistress. That's soon done."

We rang up the Harbottle (a mistake there somewhere; it ought surely to be Bluebottle), and we paid our bill cheerfully. We didn't hug the bill up to our nose and say, "I consider it outrageous," though I'm bound to say it was outrageous. What with the high tea, and the hot and cold laid on, she had mounted it up to £8 15s. 6¾d.

I did hear Selina say afterwards that she had "*looked* at her!" I don't know what she meant by emphasising the "*looked* at her!" And she also said on another occasion, "Never get familiar with your inferiors." We had been too pleasant. Those sort of folks always make you pay over — no, under — the nose if you are too pleasant.

Sabina Ann carried the portmanteau, Selina carried the air-cushion (which she had blown out to the proportions of a home-fed sucking-pig). No wonder she wanted to sit down and rest on a stone set up like a Jacob's pillar *en route*! All that loss of vital spark (for it comes

to that) wasted on an air-cushion ! I carried Tintoretto and the red boat-umbrella.

We all looked as neat as new pins, and walked in single file, very much admired (we fancied), or why did people run to their shop-doors and grin, and stare, and nudge, and call another neighbour and gather into knots ? Dozens of little boys endeavoured to wrest the portman-teau from Sabina Ann, but she stuck to it like a Briton. At any rate, we hadn't half the things to carry that Jerome K. Jerome's "three men" had, and the crowd didn't grow like theirs did.

Tintoretto is twice as well-behaved as Montmorency. She is the mother of one kitten, which she saved from drowning with her other twelve (dear pet !) by rushing it into a clothes basket ; and after hiding it there (much as Hagar hid her Ishmael) for one whole night, she came and mewed and entreated for its life by hurling herself into the basket with it, and pleading with the unutterable eloquence of a cat that the destroying cook (not angel) might spare it.

And so we got to the river, the shining river, and got into place, and laughed up at the sun for pure joy, and ran our fingers along in the water for the mere delight of testing its delicious coolness ; and the river, to our fond imagination, seemed glad to see us, for it rocked our boat as a mother rocks her infant's cradle, tenderly, tunefully, thoughtfully, and the trees seemed to bow their haughtiness before us as if they acknowledged that we could speak of them as those who loved them, if not with the wisdom of King Solomon, at least with the patient investigation of botanists ; and the pure sweet river air playfully rushed round us, and murmured and sighed out its hundred songs in our glad ears.

We had started with the long, calm, strong stroke which is, I consider, the stroke of measured strength.

You pull away from most scullers if you begin as we began. For instance, there were dozens of craft afloat when we started; something was "on," and the 'Arries had come from far and near. One of these gentlemen was determined to race us. He had a boat called "Pecksniff's Dream"—a curious name for a boat—some connection with Dickens, evidently.

"I forbid racing!" I said sternly, as I saw Selina getting down to her work, and Sabina Ann putting her back into it and kicking at her stretcher in a way that meant death or victory.

Racing, like gambling, is not a sin *per se*; but the Champion had cautioned us not to race, and I saw very well what was in the air.

"No racing!" I said, with a slow distinct utterance, using my teeth to make the words bite. "If you race I'll lodge the nose of the boat in that bank. I'll capsize it; I'm at the rudder." I spoke to the winds.

"Pecksniff's Dream" was becoming a reality. He was gaining, gaining, gaining! Selina just turned her head, and looked straight into Sabina's eyes! The thing was done. We were racing—racing as hard as the Eights any day!—racing in grand form, I can tell you!

Seeing that I had lost the day of wise counsel, I went in for the madness of pure sport. I even found myself urging those two girls on as hard as I could.

"Go it, Sabina! Well done, Selina! Never be beat! Don't be beat! Go it! go it! I'll dodge in between those two boats; I'll creep in between those two steamers; I'll crawl along under the bank, but be beat—never! Go it, Selina! my splendid Selina! My clever, darling Sabina, go it! Noble girls! Noble Bereans! Won't I *fête* you after this!"

The boat was leaping along; the oars were literally

thrashing the water. Yet the high feather was maintained, the swing even, and the catch gripping. I could hear the deep breathing of Selina and Sabina; they were straining nerve and sinew to win the day.

The water-road to Chertsey winds in and out—intercepts you. Surprise-turns and crooked bends make you, if you know your river, as crafty as any old fox. To our delight (for we had now come to that pitch of enthusiastic indifference that we were charmed with this river notoriety! we were ready to clasp old sheep-bell "Notoriety" to our hearts), a steamer packed with pleasure-folks was following hard on us. Seeing we were racing, with true patriotic love of sport they kept behind—close behind, but not close enough to flurry us.

A mass of heads were collected in the bows; handkerchiefs were waved, and great strong voices yelled, "Hurrah! Well done, bow! Bravo, stroke! Hurrah, cox!"

The air was full of animation.

"More to the left—right, left, turn!" gasped Selina, as we kept the tortuous course. "Keep us in! Keep us out of the stream! Hug the bank!"

"Pecksniff's Dream" was now nearly neck and neck.

"Keep your minds calm and cool!" I gasped. "The man is grinning like a savage; he is about to eat us! Now put it on! Now let her go!"

Then came a spurt from Selina and Sabina which would have done credit to a 'Varsity finish. With admirable coolness they put on a tremendous stroke—I should think nearly forty to the minute.

Now our boat commenced to forge ahead. I looked for our "Arry." I saw symptoms of distress; his mouth was open. ("Ah," I said, "his mouth is open!") I noticed a frightful giving in his back; he was two double. He looked out anxiously at us. We were now

nearly a clear length ahead. I pulled across, and took his water to give him our wash, and so dishearten him as much as possible. This distressed him frightfully. Still he pursued; but I could see from the light on Selina's and Sabina's faces that the game was up, the race won.

The bridge of Chertsey hove in view.

"Now for an easy," said Selina, as she caught her absurd little lace-begirt handkerchief out of her outside pocket, and lightly passed it across her forehead.

"Ship your sculls, Sabina. Pull into the bank, Phoebe. We will go out into the middle by and by, and catch roach and perch and anything else that's going, and handle that frying-pan, and sleep under the tarpaulin. What a slow life some people lead, to be sure! I never felt so alive in my life. I feel at peace with everybody—even poor dear 'Arry,' whom we shall never, never see again! Nothing pays like success! Pull in, dear; the race is won!"

CHAPTER XI.

FISHING FOR ROACH AND TALKING ABOUT HENLEY REGATTA.

THAT afternoon we fished for roach and perch. To get our boat anchored had been a tremendous affair. Sabina took the casting of that anchor in hand. It dragged a bit at first, and we found ourselves drifting down stream; then after a little we felt the tugging of our anchor at the nose of our boat—"pulling its nose," as Selina called it—and eventually we found ourselves held by the nose. Then we began to fish. We had three little common Japanese telescope rods, and we had baited our ground with scraps of all kinds. We didn't go in for meal pills, like old river hands, and all the horrors of

punt doings, but we still did our little best to draw the fish.

We worked the "oracle" slowly and solemnly for some time in utter silence—expectant silence! Once I heard Sabina whisper: "Everything comes to the feet of those who know how to wait"; and then she squinted down at her toes, as if she expected to see something laid down there. At last, I confess, I got sick of it, and I said that fishing required a passive temperament, and that I should never be able to catch fish.

Then Selina got a great tug, and screamed worse than the lady over the potted ham. She said it made her downright nervous, and she hoped the fish would understand she didn't want them to rise. She had no serious intentions, only wanted a bit of fun. A tug like that was inconceivable boldness on the part of one of the "Carp" family.

Sabina Ann said she had always considered Selina a coward at bottom; and, for her part, if the fish offered to rise, she was certain the courage would be given to her whereby to land it—to land it, she reiterated. But, she continued, she was certain her shadow was enough for the fish, for she hadn't had a rise—but one! but one! (this with a slow melancholy roll of her head). As for me, I looked at my floating line, and seeing that nothing came of it, I remarked "that the indifference of roach and perch was extraordinary." I shouldn't carp over it, like Sabina and Selina, but learn to be as pleased with a bait without result as a result without a bait! (True philosophy.) Selina said fishing from a boat had a ridiculous look. She was certain we looked ridiculous; and to talk sense and look ridiculous was worse, to her mind, than to talk ridiculous and look sense; and then she flung herself down at the bottom of the boat, and said she should take her revenge on the

fish—she declined to catch them. She should withdraw her rod, and leave the result to us. She also said she wished to be left in peace; and, further, that she feared a September sun—heated, as it is, with the threefold strength of the kiss of a going-down sun—was injuring her complexion, and she begged us not to mind her placing her pocket-handkerchief over her face. She had forgotten to bring her scarlet gauze veil.

So there she lay, looking inconceivably melancholy, till Sabina drew her line softly out of the water and landed her bait on Selina's nose, which was sharply indicated under the handkerchief, whereupon Selina jumped furiously up, and the boat all but capsized.

"Right her, we are shipping water!" I exclaimed. "Steady the boat!" Then we had to bail out the water with one of our mugs, and I spoke very sharply indeed to Selina. I told her she was doing what many another had done before her—lie down and kick when things went adversely. To get up and kick, I said, was far better; that meant self-help: the other was a lazy, helpless course of action, likely to land neither carp, nor roach, nor perch. "If you take to that sort of thing, Selina," I said, "you will never get up again, never! and, I tell you, Sabina Ann and I shall walk over you rough-shod. I don't intend to stand here, with this blazing sun beating down on my sensitive cranium, filling mugs with the water that your incapacity to land fish has brought upon us."

At this juncture Sabina gave an extraordinary chuckle; the sound was peculiar, I can't describe it. It was more like a bird of prey than aught else. She was landing something. O, what a dance that roach led her! It rose, nibbled, went under; rose again, nibbled, and floundered, and got off the hook, and was gone; came back—unprecedented occurrence out fishing—and was

on again. Then Sabina stood up to her work. She pulled; the roach pulled back. She drew in her line sharp. The roach now seemed secure; but suddenly, with one great big tug, that enormous roach (for we saw it for one moment, and one moment only) got up; and it is my belief I saw it look at Sabina, and then, with one great jump, carry her telescope Japanese rod, and her line, and, best of all, her bait, clean off, and deliver the whole of it up to Madame Roach, and all the little Roach waiting to know the issue of that fish-catching exploit. I didn't look at Sabina—I couldn't; I was yelling. It was very unladylike of me, very much so; but on that account I enjoyed it all the more. Unless laughter is tinged with a fearsome dread of consequences, it loses all its zest. We shall be angels, not men and women, when our sense of humour leaves us.

Sabina went to the portmanteau in silence, and got out a horrible long cloudy arrangement in wool, which had been made for her during the long winter nights by Miss Pipkin when Mr. Pipkin read the *Times* and patted his gouty leg, spread out on the footstool rest, and talked it over between the leaders (the gouty leg, not the *Times*). She wound it round her throat several times rather tightly, and then drew a sort of hooded end of it over her hat, and sat like that for more than a *mauvais quart-d'heure*, raving against the fish in the river, the fish in the sea, and the fish in the shops—all fish, dead and alive.

We listened. I had folded up my rod complacently. I had had, it was true, no sport; but my rod was left to me. Selina, by way of making us all a good cup of tea, had spilt the paraffin oil over those sweet little pink sugared cakes stuck around with almonds that I delight in, and was pretending nothing had happened. I said something about pouring oil on the troubled waters,